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ABSTRACT

This essay presents an ethnographer's thoughts on the failure of educational reform following a 4-month observation of a school superintendent and her staff. The educational reform involved implementation of Sizer's model--the Coalition for Essential Schools--in a small, progressive, wealthy school district. The district consisted of a K-12 school serving approximately 300 students with 27 staff. With very high per-pupil funding, the school had a principal and a superintendent, advanced technology in all classes, and a large budget for in-service activities. Commitment to the Coalition for Essential Schools model means commitment to democratic reform. However, the superintendent held to the traditional authoritarian structure, even though smallness offered a unique opportunity for democratic community organization. Ethnographic analysis suggested that hubris was the tragic flaw preventing reform. Hubris prevents an individual from entertaining information that is unflattering or critical and lessens empathic involvement with others. A brief review of the early history of professional school administration reveals a defensive response to public criticism, foundations in industrial management that were antithetical to democratic ideals, and a belief in the expertise of administrators as superior to that of teachers. The administrator under observation lashed out at teachers that resisted her goals, dismissed a consultant that advised respect for teachers, and avoided or misinterpreted literature dealing with democratic reforms. Concluding thoughts reflect on the role of moral authority in leadership and the future of educational leadership as a profession. (SV)

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The Tragic Flaw of Educational Administration

by
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The following segmented academic essay surfaces from observations and experiences as a thirty year professional educator who recently completed a four month ethnographic observation of a school superintendent and her staff. The superintendent was implementing the Coalition for Essential Schools reform in a small, progressive and wealthy school district. I thought that this particular situation might offered a unique opportunity to study a successful reform. In my mind, commitment to the Coalition for Essential Schools model meant commitment to a democratic reform. Unfortunately, the administrative leader of the reform held to the traditional authoritarian structure. She did so even when the smallness offered a unique opportunity for a democratic community organization. What I offer is my conviction about a causal factor that may contribute to what Sarason has deemed "the predictable failure of school reform".[1] The reflections draw heavily upon my former experiences as professional educator, qualitative researcher, and as a family therapist to severely dysfunctional families.

When I departed my ethnography I was asked if I could briefly describe why the reform was not a success. The concept of hubris came to mind. Hubris is well known as the tragic flaw that dominated Greek mythology. What is hubris? In essence, hubris is pride that results in violence to the holder and others. It is often expressed in literature, philosophy and sociology as the twin of narcissism. And like narcissism, hubris makes it difficult to entertain information that is unflattering or critical to the self, and thus, it lessens, if not erases, empathic involvement with the other. Thus, the holder often holds images of him or herself that support a view that could be called delusional. Certain that their image constitutes reality many narcissistic/"hubric" [my word] individuals cannot seriously entertain information to the contrary. Thus, the holder cannot easily change or reform. The imminent twentieth century psychoanalyst Kohut has concluded that this type of individual should be called the tragic man [woman].[2] My ethnographic analysis pointed to this tragic flaw at work.

Moral Response and Empathic Ability

Critical social theorist Alford argued that the characters created by the Geek poets of tragedy were remarkable in their consistent avoidance of introspection. Lacking in reflexivity these character were unable to reflect on their own or others thought. Seen as too full of pride these characters were marked by the flaw of hubris.[3] Alford, also, argues that the absence of self-reflexivity contributed to the characters' rigid ethic an ethic similar to the justice-rights ethics detailed by Gilligan.[4]

Gilligan's study found evidence of two response categories to moral dilemmas: the justice-rights ethic that is rule driven, and therefore generally unresponsive and inflexible when faced with new experiences, and the ethic of care, that is highly context oriented and tied to concerns of relatedness and belonging. While Gilligan found evidence that both men and women can exemplify either ethic, women far outnumbered men in the ethic of care, as men did with the ethic of rights and justice. As the justice and rights ethic is lacks a situational relatedness and tends to be universally rigid its limitations with social relations are profound. In fact, it appears that educational leadership must draw upon a combined ethic, one that can call, as needed, on either the justice-rights perspective and/or the care ethic. Yet, there is reason to speculate that some narcissistic/hubric individuals may be unable to call upon the ethic of care as needed. Further, it appears the professional and public image of school leaders may encourage a certain type of individual to its ranks, one constituted by empathic weakness.

Empathy or the ability to feel-with the other is an emotional response that constitutes an affective intelligence. It is constituted through the interaction of a child with its caregivers. The degree of empathic response is dependent upon how well and consistently the child's emotional needs were attended to by his or her significant adults. The empathic quality seen in adults reflects the degree of damage or wound to the child emotional development . An empathic disability contributes to the level of

emotional intelligence and to our decision-making ability as adults. High vulnerability to criticism, defensiveness, contempt for others and a disintegration of self-awareness are some of the concomitant results of a weak empathic intelligence.[5]

Constructing the Images of Professional School Leaders

The beginning of American professional school administration was far from auspicious as it reflected a reactive and defensive response to public criticism during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Public distrust of school administrators was high. Uneducated for their roles these men organized a response that led to the reconfiguration of the schools and to the redesign of their own roles within the hierarchy of school organization. Seeking to legitimize their new position they made themselves the key director of the school district and claimed the metaphor of educational expert to describe themselves.

Metaphors effect both those who receive them and those who offer them as they give rise to the "way an individual reacts, and shapes the future behavior of individual..to various situations...".[6] However, when a metaphor is created prior to the substance it will have to be legitimated. In this case school administrators as a group claimed expertise when they clearly had not demonstrated such. One result was that early school administrators wrote unabashedly that teachers were mentally inferior to administrators thus boosting their right to control all major educational decisions.

The adoption at this same time of a bureaucratic organization for school,also, contributed to furthering the privilege position of the school administrators. However, some educators noted that the new progressive administrators were embracing the industrial value system, and its new managerial doctrine of scientific management. Alarms were sounded, as many, including Margaret A. Haley, leader of the Chicago Federation of Teachers, argued that the discourse of industrialism supported values of commercialism which were antithetical to a social democracy and thus equity for all Americans. Haley railed against the effects of this efficiency discourse as she belived

it would subordinate humanity to commercialism, and thus, she warned educators to be wary of a "false or incomplete ideal" which could only be harmful to the ideal of democracy. However, by 1920 serious challenge to the new language and structure for schools was waning, and the twenties would bring the first decade of social efficiency curriculum and school management under the direction of the new professionally educated school administrators. Since Haley's time many sociologists of education have ageed with her on the effects of this discourse.

However, in my state the notion that school administrators need to be professional education experts has now received its severest blow .[7] Arguing that professional educators have not committed themselves to the ideal of a technologically competitive businessworld politicians and the media have supported and brought about the removal of educational certification for professional school adminstrators. Within my college many educators overwhelmingly express a view that the ruling means the end of good public schools. Why? Because, they say, businessmen will take over the schools, and they know nothing about how schools are different from business. It is distressing to hear such reasoning as it reveals the educators' ahistorical knowledge and their naiveté. For the discourse that frames, and has framed, professional education for decades has been more in line than not with the thinking of American business. Sarason would not be surprised by my colleagues response as he concluded that policy makers are limited by their own historical experience, one that is rarely informed by a larger view of their professional history.[8] (Evidence of this appeared when I asked a veteran professor of educational administration to recommend a history of professional school administration. She said she new of none. I see such ahistoricity in a university community as a symptom of social and psychic dysfunction.)

The Changing Metaphoric Images of School Administrators

The scientific expert has dominated as the metaphor for school administrators. Other metaphors, such as civic leader, spiritual leader, community leader, and others have surfaced but not held. While the politics of the larger society clearly contributes to this changing and not changing image I think this case will show how the factor of moral response may also constribute.

Beck and Murphy's review of the literature written by school administrators from 1920 to 1990's found various common metaphorical themes.[9] The 1920's which was the first decade to feel the effects of professional schools of administration brought to the front the administrator as scientist and social efficiency expert. During the late forties that Beck and Murphy found educational writers calling for equality of authority in schools between teacher and administrator and some discourse on democraticd citizenry. This did not last for long as the fifities and sixties were dominated by increasing calls for standardization, efficiency and increased images of the administrator as a bureaucrat. Drawing more heavily upon technology and school management schools became larger and more impersonal. Programmed instruction, a highly impersonal form of instruction, was hailed as a great boom and increasingly, school administration in the sixties becomes less concerned about civics, intellectuality, and spirituality, and took more cues from the factory and laboratory (Beck and Murphy, 101) . In fact, the birth of our present preoccupation with standardization ,say Beck and Murphy, came to the fore during the sixties. Beck and Murphy, also, theorize that increased numbers of students, especially of minority students, encouraged administrators to call for more controls through uniformity and standardization. While many teachers encouraged more open schooling during the sixties Beck and Murphy found numerous writers calling for control and limits on teacher autonomy, and for parents to be kept happy but outside the governance of schools. While the seventies brought a radical change in discourse dominated by

overtones of humanism and community, and less bureaucracy it would not last as the eighties discourse criticized educators for being soft and contributing to the decline in the economy. The recent recognition of the crisis in urban education and its entrenchment in bureaucratic thinking has brought a critique of educational bureaucracy from many perpsectives but also a call by some to remove schooling from professional education. However, I found myself most interested inTheodore Sizer's approach to the evils of the bureaucratic model and its call for more democratic practice. Several years later I was invited to study his model, the Coalition for Essential Schools, in a small, progressive and wealthy school district.

The Name of the Game: Constancy and Change.

The on-going Sizer reform was directed to all twelve grades which were housed in one building. (The present superintendent, or super, had inherited the reform from her predecessor but never admitted to this.) The student body totaled three hundred or less students and the staff numbered twenty-seven. Being one of the highest in per pupil funding in the state it had two full time administrators: a principal and a superintendent, a full time business agent; advanced technology in all classes, and an almost unlimited in-service budget.

The very social and dynamic "super", just completing her doctorate in educational administration, was frustrated that certain teachers were still resisting her goals. Thinking she could bring them around with an outside team expert she hired a consultant to visit regularly with these teachers. To my researcher's delight, I was asked to shadow the consultant even to his debriefing with the superintendent and principal. While the consultant might have been brought to the schools as a "hired gun" he proved to be empathic and deeply interested in the teachers' stories. The consultant found, as I had, that the resistant teachers feared the administration, and that they had good reason to fear them. I watched and listened as the consultant told the administration that they would have to change their ways and invest in genuine

caring and respect for these teachers. Suffice it to say, the administration did not like what they were told, and after a few weeks they dismissed the consultant. I could not reconcile this behavior with the teaching of Sizer, who according to the superintendent was her idol. Initially, I was at a lost as to how I could understand it.

Finding out from the teachers that the reform had commenced during the tenure of the past superintendent I interviewed him. He had retired from the district after thirty plus years. Beginning as a teacher and coach during the late fifties he was asked by the board to assume the vacancy of the principalship and later that of the superintendent. I inquired as to when he obtained his professional certification as a school administrator. He never did, he said.. He learned on the job, and from attending workshops, association meetings and conferences . "I felt I had what I needed to do the job from my education as a teacher and coach. All I needed was a course on law and finance.", he said. But I wondered if his lack of professional education in administration had particular consequences. To my surprise he said it was a good thing he had not been required to partake of the certification program. "Why?', I asked. "...in all my years of being around superintendents I never found them to be open to advice. They will appear to listen, but they don't seem to be able to admit when they're wrong, and they continue following a broken path", he said. My field notes show that I thought of Sarason's conclusions about the predictable failure of school reform, and the "intractability" of educational leaders to critically assess past efforts at reform.

Returning to my observation of the acting superintendent I want to focus on several reading responses that I found puzzling and disconcerting. The superintendent asked me to make suggestions for readings that might help her with her dissertation which was on the Coalition. I included amongst them Cuban's text on constancy and change in school reform. She said, with annoyance, that she had heard of him, and his criticism of administrators, so she would "pass on" that reading.

On another occasion the superintendent asked why I thought the Coalition model supported democratic practice. The super said she did not find any evidence of democratic practices in Sizer's writings, so, I referred her to **The Stone Trumpet** by Gibboney. (Gibboney makes a point of addressing Sizer's weakness in stating his desires for democratic practice).. However, I had no difficulty seeing that the practices were democratic in nature so I was puzzled as to why the superintendent did not see them as such. I wondered why she could not see what was unmistakenly democratic practice. After all, she had insisted that she "had read everything SIzer has ever written, and heard him speak numerous times". "Why", I asked her, "did you turn to Sizer as a model for refrom?" She had been bored in school and Sizer's challenge for more in depth and rigorous learning appealed to her. This response was also puzzling. Her reasoning seemed to express another contradiction for she did not display in her own thinking what she said she desired.

This contradiction was reinforce when after reading Gibboney she came to me saying she didn't think she could continue reading it because, "He doesn't like the Coalition very much". Again I found myself at a lost to understand her seemingly confused and uncritical reading of the texts on reform.

In addition, a common feature of weekly team meeting was the super's requirement that the teachers read read articles that appeared in the monthly Coalition newsletter, Horace. Often she would focus on one item while ignoring its context. One example was an article on the benefits of teaming. She chose to ignor how the article conceived of teaming, that is, she ignored the philosophic frame contextualizing teaming. A teacher pointed to the contextualization of teaming, but the super ignored the imput leaving the gathered members silent and angry.

While pondering the question of the super's reading of reform texts, and its meaning, I came upon **The Empathic Reader** by Bouson (1989). Bouson's text is devoted to an analysis of the role of empathy, or its absence, narcissism, in the

reading process. According to Reed, a psychoanalyst cited in Bouson, reading is "akin to what psychoanalysis calls countertransference in its broadest sense". In other words it is like " the emotional responses of the analyst to the patient which, [when] scrutinized, may provide him [her] with valuable information ...or *unscruntinized, may interfere with his [her] understanding and response* ..." (24-25, italic mine). While Boson's post-modern analysis is limited to the examination of fictional texts I see no reason to suspect that an administrator reading a critique of other administrators could not experience similar effects. As you recall it is empathy that allows the individual to hear others and to be reflexive about their own thinking. Bouson's conclusion was that empathy is "central" to the reading experience for it is not just that the text works on readers, but the reader also works on texts.

Wondering about the thrust of recent texts being used in educational leadership I interviewed two professors of a new educational leadership doctoral program. They were happy to tell me that educational administration literature had changed, and now reflected values of caring and respect for human diversity. But I wondered about the sustainability of this recent inclusion of caring in educational leadership. After all it was not the first time in the history of school administration that the voice of humanism and cultural diversity had surfaced in school administrative texts. My wonder increased after reading a review of contemporary texts on educational leadership.

Dunlap and Schmuck (1995) concluded that a bifurcation of significance appears in the recent inclusion of cultural awareness in educational leadership texts. For instance, issues of diversity now appear in leadership texts. Yet, one text that included a chapter on the evils of sexism was followed by sexist discourse in other areas of the text. Dunlap and Schmuck credit this tokenist approach to a privilege mindscape of leadership authors. In other words, if it weren't for their ideology of privilege the authors might bring a non-elitist perspective and thus a real concern for equity and greater inclusion. But is it the effect of a privileged group or something that

may find expression through that group that hinders tranformative leadership?

Clearly many who hold leadership positions do not always lead. Leadership means to persuade and some never persuade, but just manage, and management is not leadership. Is it a point of confusion?

Moral Authority and Leadership

My recent experience tells me that the place to begin assess the meaning of leadership is with confronting the ethics that must be embedded within any concept of leadership. Transformational leadership can only be conceived within the values of the statkeholders in the community. So barring a connection and personal caring about the community and all it stakholders transformative leadership is not likely. So what is at work when the "leaders" hold a "false or incomplete" ideal or vision?

I found the administration repeatedly failed to uphold the basic tenets of the model they sought to implement. One of their many violations was that the model called for reform to be built with the community of constituent stakeholders. Instead I found imposition. Another was that learning was expected to be personalized, yet teachers who presented sound personal views that differed with those of the administration were labeled as resisters. This was particularly distressing as these same teachers did support the ideas found in the Coalition literature. Further, I witnessed several instances of administrator behavior to teachers that bore on emotional abuse.[10].

I believe that these failures can be read as empathic failures. For it must be remembered that the ideas of another be they in oral or written form are representative of the subject of the other. The repeated misreading of others, whether in written or oral form, appears to me as a failure to care for the views of others. In other words, these failures may signify a highly defended individual (in psychology called a selfobject) whose "..intrasychic processes concerning the self" carry active narcissistic needs of the individual's child. Whenever an individual stands in relation to the other

relational needs are reactivated. When the narcissistic adult does not get what he or she want distrust, contempt or even rage is engendered. Repeatedly the super told me she wanted to get rid of her resistant teachers and describe them in the most negative terms.

Psychologists and sociologists alike agree that the most common disorder of the self in modern culture is the narcissistic one. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that many who choose to be authority figures will likely suffer from the narcissis/hubris dysfunction. After all the image of the school administrator as leader is a ripe attraction for those needing to control and act out narcissistic needs. Further, I believe we can expect that the ethic or moral authority of such individuals will be constituted not by relatedness, and a sustained empathic caring, but by a rigidity of rights.

The evidence for claiming hubris mounts. The intensity of the super's deaf ear to critique paralleled the absence of needed reparation. When it was clear that an administrator had demeaned a teacher, there were no apologies. Vetlesen, a moral philosopher, argues that before one can think to act morally one must be able to perceive that a moral situation has presented itself.[11] Unable to perceive that a situation is a moral one cognition cannot come into play. Preconditions are necessary, and these preconditions for moral performance are laid during the very first years of an individual's socialization. This early precondition establishes what will be one's capacity to perceive right and wrong; it is the foundation of all moral thought, argues, Vetlesen, and the resultant perception is empathic sensitivity. This perception argues Vetlesen, is what ` "gives" judgment its object". (122) In other words the initial stage of morality is prior to judgment, reciding in our perceptions. Thus, empathy is the ability to "feel-with" the other, to maintain one's identity while respecting the pain or views of the other. Thus, learning how to be a moral leaders in ed school has it limitations.

The team consultant told the super she needed to hear and respect the views

Haven: Yale University. Press, 1988.

[4]. See Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

[5]. See Daniel Goleman's **Emotional Intelligence**. New York: Bantam Books, 1995.

[6]. Owens and Shakeshaft cited in Lynn G. Beck and Joseph Murphy's **Understanding the Principalship: Metaphorical Themes, 1920-1990**. New York: Teachers College Press, 1993.

[7]. My state is Michigan.

[8]. See Sarason. **Psychoanalysis, General Custer, and the Verdicts of History, and other essays on psychology in the social science**. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc. 1994.

[9]. See Lynn G. Beck and Joseph Murphy's **Understanding the Principalship: Metaphorical Themes, 1920-1990.**

[10].When a teacher asked for cooperation from the administration to help curb uncivil preschool behavior, she was met with a tongue lashing by the principal that caused others present to grow silent, withdraw and some to silently cry. After the principal left the room, I was told the principal behavior was not unusual behavior. Yet, the superintendent sided with the principal saying, "The teacher needed to be put in her place". I had not seen the need at all.

[11].See Arne Johan Vetlesen, **Perception, Empathy and Judgment: An Inquiry into the Preconditions of Moral Performance**. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994. This text weaves philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology and literature to make a comprehensive argument that emotions are central to our cognitive decision making.

of her teachers in order to encourage their commitment to the reform. The super asked to speak with me after her first attempt to put the consultant's suggestions into practice, saying, "I don't think I can do it, it is so sweet, and I can't stand it", and, indeed, after two attempts she abandoned the suggestions.

Void of a strong grounding in empathy, narcissism and hubris fill the void. As the individual achieves hubris grows in strength. Unable to inform the self by reflexive thinking the individual shoots him or herself in the foot repeatedly, but unable to introspect on this interprets the resulting problems as externally caused.

To conclude, if this interpretation about obstacles to school administrative leadership is plausible then educational leadership as a profession must be revisited for who and how this role should be constructed. Certainly it is not the academic aspect of education that is crucial for leadership. For it appears that transformative leadership entails a moral ethic constituted by relatedness and empathy, both qualities having to be established long before a doctoral program. Further, any college of education that further the separation of administrative and teacher preparation programs must see how it contradicts its rhetoric of schools as community and educators as collaborators with communities. I don't believe that compassionate educators can tolerate any longer the long-standing separation of teacher and administrative preparation. And we, as educators and school board members, must learn how to assess the moral authority of the person. For as the snake said to the turtle as the turtle carried him across the pond, and just after he stung it, it appears that how we behave is "in our nature."

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1. See Seymour B. Sarason's **The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform**, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc. 1990.

2. Heinz Kohut has numerous publications. Most particular to narcissism and empathy see "introspection, Empathy and the Semicircle of Mental Health", **International Jounal of Psycho-analysis** 63 (1982) 395-408. Rpt. in Lichtenberg, **Empathy**. 1: 81-100; and "Narcissism as Resistance and as a Driving Force in Psychoanalysis". **Search**, 2: 547-61.

3. See Alford's **The Psychoanalytic Theory of Greek Tragedy**, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992 and **Narcissism: Socrates, The Frankfurt School and Psychoanalytic Theory.** New